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DE RUEHRB #1335/01 2351401
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 231401Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7234
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 4498
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2148
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3361
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 5754
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 001335

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, NEA/PI, DRL, LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2017

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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL CAMMACK:THE MOROCCAN ELECTORAL ORCHESTRA

REF: RABAT 01331

Classified By: Polcouns Craig Karp. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

(C) The Moroccan Election Director told us that election monitors were welcome to confirm what he expected to be the most free and fair elections in Morocco's history on September 7. He added that the Ministry of Interior and the king were "out of the business of running elections" and sought only to facilitate Moroccan development and progress through free and fair voting. He gave an overview of the election system and talked at length about monitors' access to polling stations (reftel). End Summary.

MOI CONDUCTING THE ORCHESTRA, NOT WRITING THE SCORE

¶2. (C) During an August 10 meeting at Ministry of Interior (MOI) with Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff Member Perry Cammack, Polcouns, and Poloff, Moroccan Director of Elections Hassan Aghmari likened his role to that of an orchestra conductor ensuring that every instrument plays its part in the "electoral symphony." He also said that the king is out of the business of running elections. "The king is now a citizen and the MOI carries the will of the people. Observers will confirm this fact and we welcome them." Aghmari said that elections were not the ultimate goal. The development and progress that free and fair voting ushers in was what he wanted to facilitate.

A SYSTEM MOVING TOWARDS EQUALITY

¶3. (U) Aghmari went on to explain Morocco's electoral apportionment system. Out of a total of 325 seats in Parliament, 295 represent local districts. 30 seats are designated "at-large constituencies" and set aside solely for women - the so called National List. He emphasized the fact that the political parties themselves came with up the idea for the National List and agreed upon it jointly. It was not a governmental or royal initiative and is not written in the law, but is a "moral attempt" to create gender equality in

the representational arena. At-large seats are assigned to party candidates in accordance with their overall electoral proportional status. Additionally, the parties have agreed to internally allocate ten percent of local candidate slots to women.

¶4. (U) From 1963 until 2002, Morocco used a "first past the post" system in which the winning party took all seats in a district. Beginning in 2002, a new proportional system was introduced that would prevent any one party from taking control of parliament and the government but instead forced consensus through coalition building. In the new system, the winning party is allocated one or two of the two-to-five seats assigned to each electoral district. The second runner up gets another, and the third another. If the winning party exceeds a pre-determined number of votes, it receives an additional seat, and the remaining seat or seats are divided up between the next greatest vote getters.

THE MECHANICS OF MOROCCAN ELECTIONS

¶5. (U) Voting and electoral certification is conducted at three levels. The initial level where votes are cast is managed by the Vote Bureau (VB). They are independent of the MOI. The VBs tabulate results and transmit their tallies and ballots to the Centralization Bureau (CB). The CB consolidates and certifies these results, and gives them to the Provincial Commission (PC), which validates and announces the results. Each unit at the different levels consists of a president, secretary, member, and an alternate for each of the preceding, although the President of the PC is a sitting

RABAT 00001335 002 OF 002

judge of the Court of First Instance. Political parties have the right to designate representatives to observe each level of the certification process. The National List is adjudicated by the National Electoral Commission, whose president is the President of the Supreme Court and members are drawn from the Magistrates Chamber. The only organ authorized to communicate directly with a Vote Bureau is its supervisory Centralization Bureau.

¶6. (U) Aghmari also showed us a sample ballot which had just come from the official printers. Parties were represented by both written name and pictorial symbol to allow for illiterate voters. Small or weak parties that have chosen to run a "union list" with another party in hopes of consolidating votes are represented on the far left of the ballot by a joining of the two relevant parties' symbols and names. Union parties can run either on the National List or locally.

¶7. (U) Moroccan law does not provide for absentee or proxy voting by Moroccans living outside national borders because individuals must be residents of their home district in order to register and vote. Expatriates can, however, apply at a Moroccan consulate or Embassy for a residency waiver in order to return to their home district to register and vote.

FINANCING DEMOCRACY

¶8. (SBU) The GOM set aside 200 million Dirhams (\$28 million) to fund parties' electoral activity. Parties are eligible to receive thirty percent of their allotment as an advance, and the GOM has already disbursed \$7 million of that total amount to support pre-campaign organization by parties.

Only the government and party members can contribute to party coffers. Aghmari said that this helps ensure objectivity "unlike in the United States." Funding, either governmental or private, must be traceable and accounting systems must be entirely transparent. Any state funds used for un-approved purposes must be returned to the GOM.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) Aghmari appeared serious, determined, technically competent, and sincere. This was the Embassy's first meeting with him despite numerous previous requests to MOI liaison officials. He spoke with conviction about the king's mandate to the MOI to ensure a clean election. Initially trained in business management, then in law, Aghmari chose a career in the MOI. He was appointed to his post in 2006 for the purpose of overseeing the September 2007 election. He appears to be a reformer, unlike much of MOI's die-hard cadre, but will still report to the leadership. End Comment.

¶10. (U) STAFFDEL Cammack did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

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